

# How to improve services to Pilgrims who visit Tirumala

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Lord Balaji very graciously bestowed upon me a wonderful opportunity to participate in the Srivari seva program that began on 7-7-2015 and ended on 14-7-2015. I was part of a 20 member team headed by a team leader from Vizianagaram, Andhra Pradesh. I have a few suggestions for TTD administration to make on the basis of my seva work and the different roles I played at different places both at Tirupati and Tirumala. All my suggestions are based on my own personal experience during my seva work. There are five broad areas that I would like to touch upon and make some useful and constructive suggestions in each one of them. They are as follows:

- 1) The problems at the luggage collection centre.
- 2) The problems in serving meals at the Vengamamba complex.
- 3) The difficulties faced by pilgrims at the queue complex.
- 4) The need for a well planned and full utilization of the services of the seva - volunteers and
- 5) Some general suggestions.

In the following note I will elaborate on these problems one by one. They are not, however, in chronological order of my own experiences there. They are all based on the wonderful time I had during the 8 day Srivari seva program. My only motive in presenting these suggestions to TTD administration is to help it further improve the services being provided by TTD to the pilgrims who visit Tirumala in multitudes every day.

## **The problems faced by pilgrims at the luggage collection centre**

I visited Tirumala so many times in the past. I usually reach Tirumala by trekking the seven hills from Alipiri after depositing my luggage bags at Alipiri. Naturally I expect that my luggage will be handled smoothly and carefully while loading, transportation and unloading. However, when we were given seva-work at the luggage receiving centre at Tirumala on 10-7-2015 I was aghast at seeing the manner in which the luggage bags were thrown away from parcel lorry onto the ground at the entrance of

the building as if there were hardware material. From the entrance of the building the luggage bags were once again thrown away into the entire aisle length of racks in the building.

Our job was to put these bags in the shelves of respective racks according to the marked sub-numbers on the luggage bags. There were 8 twin racks and each rack has many shelves. 1,9,10 sub-numbered luggage bags were put on floor.

Because we were short in number there was no sufficient time for us to segregate all the bags belonging to one family in one shelf of the rack. For example we were supposed to put all 7 bags of a family in one shelf of the 7<sup>th</sup> rack so that this family could collect all their bags in one shelf of 7<sup>th</sup> rack. So the pilgrims were to search all the selves of the 7<sup>th</sup> rack to collect their 7 bags. To some pilgrims it is quite frustrating in finding their luggage.

In some cases all the bags of a family were not coming in one delivery. Some bags were coming in one parcel lorry and the remaining in the next. A family from Maharashtra did not get all their 9 bags in one go. Their 8 bags came on one lorry and they had to wait for two more hours to collect the remaining one luggage bag which finally came in the third consignment

Because of this unloading process the pilgrims were forced to wait for longer period of time [it is not possible to allow them during unloading process] just to take their luggage bags.

I have few suggestions for improving the luggage handling process on order to fulfill every pilgrim's wish that his/her luggage be handled smoothly and carefully.

1. Charge Rs 10 for each luggage bag/suitcase from pilgrims who want smooth and safe handling of their luggage for transporting from Alipiri to Tirumala.
2. Entrust this transportation job to contractors selected by e-auction process in the reverse bidding process from Rs 10 for each luggage bag. The contractors who quote lowest price should be awarded the contract. The final bidding price may be around Rs six considering the total distance of 50 KMs for each trip [to and fro] and with at least 8 trips per day. The contractor should deposit Rs 1 Lakh for accepting this contract.
3. The scanning of luggage at Alipiri should remain with TTD. The contractor should use LCV to transport 200 luggage bags maximum per trip. They should employ workers to load and unload these bags by hand only. The primary stipulation for awarding the contract is to be smooth and careful handling of luggage bags while loading, transportation, unloading and depositing in the racks. There should be cc TV cameras at luggage depositing and loading centre [Alipiri], and luggage unloading centre at Tirumala to ensure smooth and careful handling of each luggage bag.

4. All the luggage bags belonging to one family should be transported in the same consignment [in the same LCV]. At the Tirumala luggage collection centre they should put luggage bags belonging to one family in one shelf only.
5. For the loss/damage of any luggage, the contractor should pay Rs 20,000 per one luggage bag to the loser. If there is a loss of three bags per month the contract should be terminated with the forfeiture of Rs 1 lakh security deposit.
6. More volunteers, who come for Srivari seva, should be given the seva works at luggage collection centre and at luggage receiving centre for smooth and careful handling of luggage bags. Rough handling of luggage bags should be avoided.

On 7-7-2015 from 9 pm to 4 pm we were asked to do seva work in Vengamamba free meals complex.

### **Suggestions to reduce waiting time of pilgrims who take meals at Vengamamba complex.**

There are 4 huge dining halls at Vengamamba free meals complex. Three of the halls are for table meals serving and one is for the buffet meals serving. What I observed at these table meals serving halls are 1] more wastage of food at table served halls when compared to buffet meals service hall, 2] in table served halls the pilgrims will have to wait for more time between each serving of food items. 3] More number of people could able to take meals per hour in buffet served hall when compared to tables served hall.

#### **My suggestions**

- 1] Convert 3 halls into buffet service with more food counters as designed in the diagram given below.
- 2] Reserve one hall with dining tables for serving meals for senior citizens and physically challenged.
- 3] Entrust more seva volunteers for seva work at Vengamamba complex and all other free meals centers like Srinivasam, Madhavam, TTD canteen, etc. at Tirupati and Tirumala.

### **Advantages with buffet meals service halls**

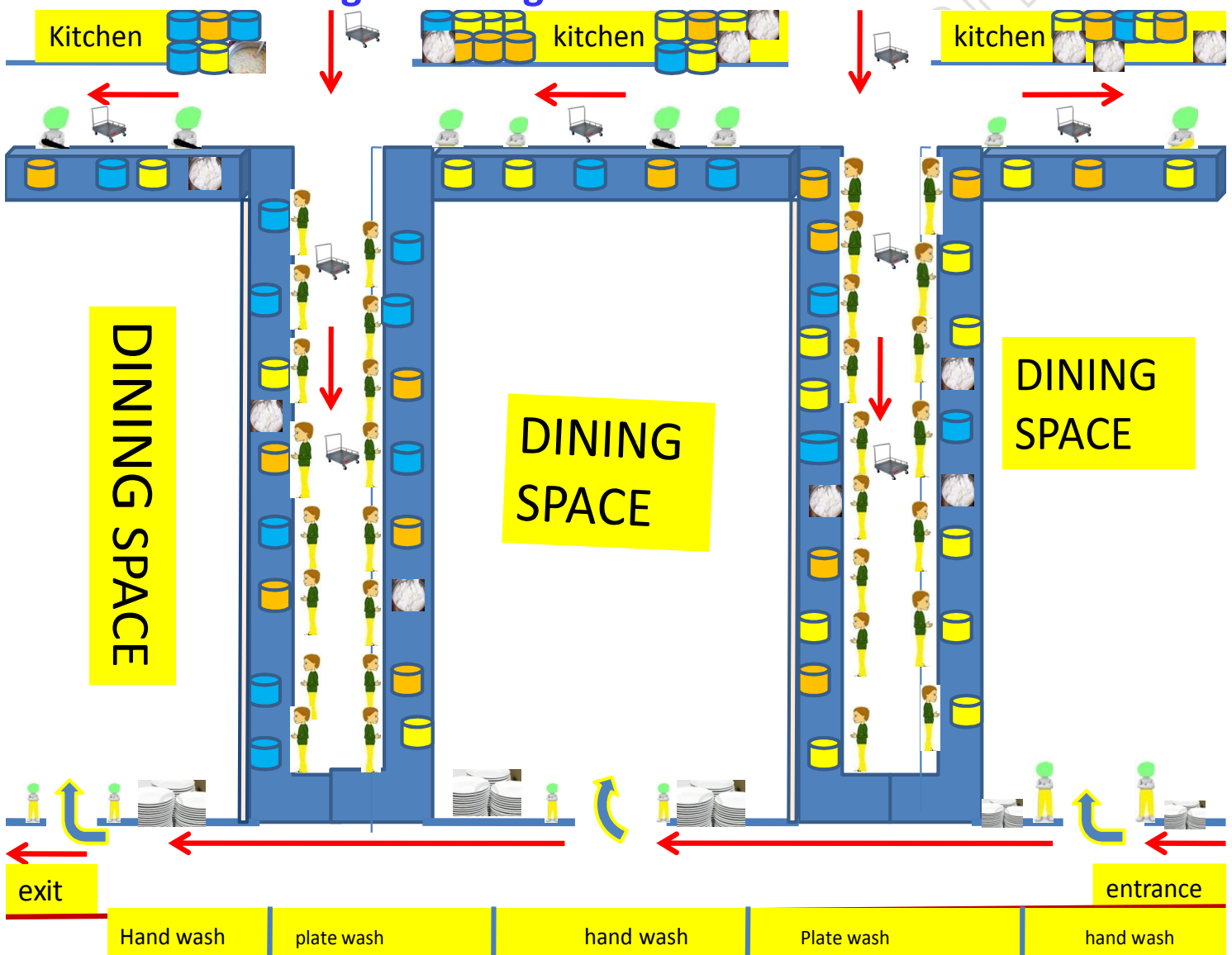
1] Food items can be served multiple times in small quantities so that there will be less wastage of food. Pilgrims can have their chosen food items instantly according to their taste without waiting for them served as in table serving halls.

2] Some people eat food slowly while some people eat food in quick time. A lot of time is being wasted between two batches of diners in halls where food is served on tables due to cleaning of tables and serving food for the next batch

3] More number of pilgrims can be served per hour. Long queues can be avoided.

I suggest the below dining hall design for buffet meals service. This hall is designed in a way that kitchen, food serving tables, dining area and wash rooms are separated from each other and have ample space for each purpose.

### A model dining hall design for free meals scheme

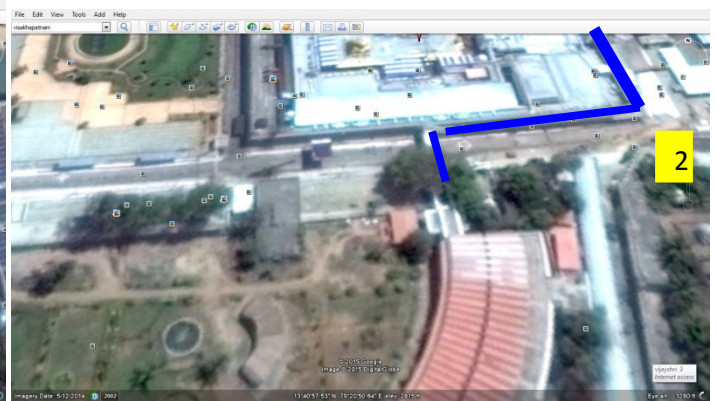


On 14-7-2015 we were given the darshan allowing us at the Supadham entry point into the queue complex. I want TTD's utmost attention to mitigate the pilgrims' agony during the passage period in the queue complex.

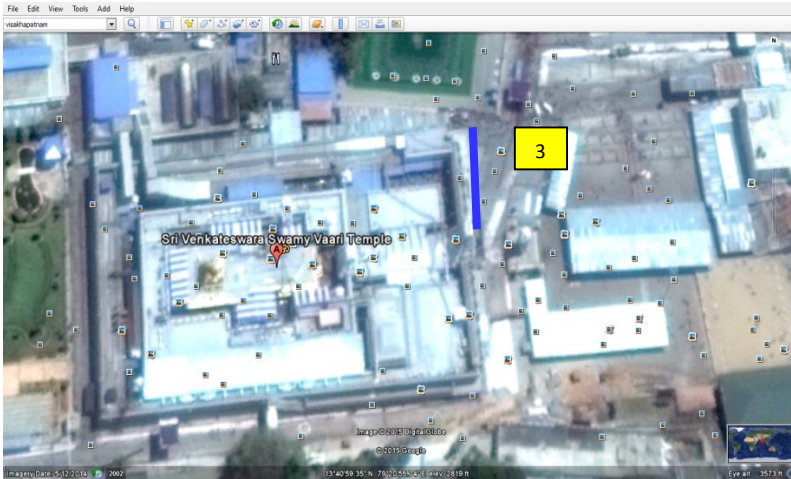
## Problem in the queue complex

Here, there were not sufficient numbers of seva volunteers or TTD staff to manage the crowd in the queue lines. As we join the other pilgrims [Sarvadarshan, Divya Darshan, and Special Entry Darshan] there was heavy pushing and jostling among pilgrims. After having waited for long hours in the compartments the pilgrims, with accumulated restlessness and anxiety in their minds, are thronging at the gate when it is opened to queue line. They are joining the running queue line with the maximum force they can exert. The agony suffered by the senior citizens and children is insurmountable. Every pilgrim, who comes to Tirumala, wants the Lord's darshan in peaceful and pure state of mind. What is happening in the queue line is quite opposite. Most of the time is being spent on shouting, chiding and arguing with one another. Only able bodied pilgrims can withstand this heavy pushing, shoving and manhandling in the queue lines. My wife almost got fainted in this melee. This is the same feeling experienced by many pilgrims. Nothing untoward has happened so far due to God's grace. I think the TTD administration has been failing miserably in managing and controlling the crowd in the queue lines. This problem can be solved if TTD administration takes corrective measures immediately. In this regard I want to give you some suggestions as follows.

Study these three images.







1. From the above images it is the first part of the queue line that adjoins the waiting halls where the unnecessary action of heavy jostling, shoving and pushing is taking place.

2. The second part of the queue line starting from the foot over bridge and runs along the Temple wall is having easy and smooth movement of pilgrims.

3. Similarly we also observe free and easy movement of pilgrims who are coming out of the temple complex in the third part of the queue line which adjoins temple wall. The mini crowding of pilgrims near Varada Raja swamy temple inside the temple complex due to alternate release of incoming and outgoing pilgrims can be ignored for time being and to be addressed later. I wish the TTD administration take immediate steps to avoid pushing and shoving in the first part of the queue complex as shown in the first image.

Although the same number of pilgrims are moving the entire length of the queue complex the pushing and shoving is happening only in the first part of the queue line. So this can be avoided if the TTD administration takes remedial steps. We have to understand human psychology to maintain orderly movement of pilgrims in the entire length of queue complex to the final Divya Darshan. When people are kept waiting for long hours the restlessness and anxiety slowly creep into their minds and fill to the saturation point. They eagerly wait for their turn to join the queue line to have Divya Darshan at the earliest. When the gates are open suddenly this exasperation will overcome their wisdom, common sense and reasoning and get them into a state of sudden urgency to join the queue line with full force. I suggest these following measures to maintain free and easy movement of pilgrims in the queue complex.

1. Employ sufficient number seva volunteers in the waiting halls and along the queue complex that runs along the waiting rooms.
2. Employ at least six seva volunteers in each waiting hall

2. Give announcement through PA system in the waiting halls before 20 minutes of opening the waiting hall gates to the queue line.

3. The announcement should be in major languages Telugu, Tamil, English, Kannada and Hindi with conciliatory and soothing words probably like this-----.

[Thank you for waiting for long time with all your patience and for cooperating with us. Now your turn will come within 30 minutes to join the queue line to have Divya Darshan. Once you join the queue line you will have Divya Darshan within half an hour. So we request you not to push and jostle with one another. Please take care of elderly people and children. Please complete your pilgrimage in peaceful, serene and calm atmosphere. Concentrate your mind only on Lord Venkatesha and nothing else. Recite the mantra “Ome Venkateshaya nama:” or Ome Namō Narayanaya” while you are moving in the queue line]

I think this type of frequent announcements will make pilgrims understand and help them have holy Divya Darshan in serene ambiance.

Repeat this sermon again and again in waiting halls and in the queue lines.

4. At one point in the queue complex before the foot over bridge there is a narrow door which is impeding the free movement of pilgrims. Up to that the pilgrims are moving in six lanes. Here the pilgrims are put to hardship and facing harrowing time while passing through this narrow door. I request the TTD administration to widen this door to facilitate free and easy movement of pilgrims.

## **Depositing cell phones at counters**

On 9-7-2013 I was given the seva work at cell phone deposit counter at Tiruchanoor Sri Padmavathi Ammavaru Temple. My service there is to stack cell phones along with receipt with rubber bands and help the staff there. There is lot of time being wasted by pilgrims for depositing and collecting their cell phone at these counters.

I request TTD administration to consider my suggestions to get away with cell phone depositing before going for Darshan. Allow the pilgrims with cell phones for darshan if they removed the batteries from the cell phone and with following conditions. 1. They should keep their cell phone with detached batteries in their pockets or bags at all times while they are inside the temple complex. 2 They should not hold the cell phones in their hands 3. They should not take photographs or video record inside the temple complex. 4. They should not reload their cell phones with batteries until they came out

of the temple complex. If the pilgrims violate any one of these conditions/stipulations their cameras should be immediately confiscated. The SIM cards can be given back to the pilgrims after retaining the cell pieces. These cell phones can be E-auctioned every month and the proceeds are to be deposited in Temple account. In due course of time the pilgrims will get accustomed to this new practice at all temples and it is no longer necessary to have cell phone deposit counters.

On 12-7-14, our services were submitted to sanitary department at Tirumala. My service work was to provide drinking water from 10 A.M. to 5 P.M. to pilgrims who move in the Special Darshan queue line that runs along the road. Here the water supplied to pilgrims was apparently not RO [reverse osmosis] purified water. The water was slight greenish in color. Even some pilgrims asked me why the water is slight greenish.

I request TTD administration to provide purified drinking water to Pilgrims at all locations. Here I will narrate a small incident that happened during this day of seva work. Two boys somehow sneaked into the queue line through small apertures in iron grills of queue line. They were putting namas on some pilgrims' foreheads, who wanted it, by charging rupees 5. Sometimes the security personnel were coming charging on them and taking them away from the queue lines. The boys were coming back after some time. This cat and mouse game happened throughout the day. I learned from the boys that the security personal were taking away 25% of their earning from them. As I watched one pilgrim gave away 10 rupee note to a boy who had put swamy nama on this pilgrim's forehead. The pilgrim did not look for the remaining change and continued on in the queue. But the boy ran after the pilgrim to hand over the 5 rupee coin to the pilgrim. He politely declined and asked the boy to retain it. Here what I saw is the boy's honesty which had come from his struggle for existence [through illegal work?] whereas the police man's dishonesty came from his paid official duty work. I do not understand why it is not allowing drawing namas on foreheads of willing pilgrims in the queue line. I think it can be allowed as long as it does not obstruct free and easy movement of pilgrims in the queue lines.

## **Proper deployment of seva volunteers**

On 7-7-2015 from 1 pm to 8 pm we were asked to do seva work at Alipiri where Swamy Lakshminarayana temple and Srivari Padalamandapam temple are situated on both sides of footsteps path at Alipiri. Here our service is to guide the walking pilgrims to visit these temples. Along with our 10 member team, there were also 2 other teams who are also given the same work. There were 40 volunteers for the same seva which



needs just 6 sevaks to do the service. There is more number of volunteers than required at some places and there is less number of volunteers at some places where their requirement is utmost necessary. This gave me an impression that there was no proper planning and coordination for utilizing the services of thousands of seva volunteers coming from different parts of the country. The number of volunteers who opt for seva works at Tirumala is growing every year. If there is a proper system of collecting the profiles of volunteers, who come for Srivari seva, according to their age, education qualification, professional work and mother tongue and storing this data in the central server at seva sadan office, they can be entrusted specific seva works at different places giving much improved services to pilgrims.

## Seva volunteers

There is a huge banner in seva sadan office advising seva volunteers what to do and what not to do.

Seva volunteers are not supposed to go to Darshan during their seva work. But I observed that majority of seva workers are going to Darshan many times during their seva work.

If TTD gives some basic information about places, locations and available facilities and services both in Tirumala and Tirupati to seva volunteers through e-mails before they come to seva work it is helpful for seva workers to give information to pilgrims when they approach them for help. So TTD should make it compulsory for seva volunteers to give information regarding their education, language, work experience and e-mail address etc, so that TTD can better utilize their services at appropriate places to assist pilgrims who come from all parts of the country.

Consider giving one hour training class to seva volunteers on the first day of their reporting and registering at seva sadan office at Tirupati before they are pressed into various services at Tirupati and Tirumala.

The food served at Vengamamba complex, Srinivasam, TTD canteen is good. But the food served at Madhavam, Vishnu Nivasam and Tiruchanoor is not up to the mark.

I finally request the TTD administration to make Tirumala the holiest of holiest places in the world by removing corruption if it exists in any form and at any place. For crores of pilgrims who visit Tirumala, Balaji is their God. But for TTD employees their foremost

God is pilgrim. Serving pilgrims with love and affection is tantamount to worshipping God.

Disclaimer – All the details, information and suggestions furnished above are based on my understanding of things I have seen and happened around me during my seva works at various places at Tirumala and Tirupati and at different times. It is up to TTD administration to use its discretion in accepting, following or rejecting my suggestions.

The information and services mentioned in this topic may have changed or improved since it was written on 16-7-2015.

With regards,

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